

**Education Governance Responses  
St. Johnsbury School – 2/6/07**

28 Attendees (facilitated by George Appenzeller)

**Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:**

**Advantages**

Town's identity is the school/tied to the school  
Town defines the school's priorities  
Shared resources/collaborative decision making by larger SU board  
Vermont students' performance on NAEP assessments is at the top nationally  
Geographic size – not too large – short bus routes  
School size – 200/700 gives options, less than 50, pride & connectedness  
Size of supervisory union – 6 towns get services  
Local control and responsibility, input and ownership  
Sustaining cultural & historical uniqueness  
Intimacy: Parents/other communities feel connected; Board feels intimately connected; real and authentic debates more likely to occur  
Board builds relationships with administration/staff & community  
No competing interests w/other towns  
Superintendent answers to one board  
Each community has equal representation on S.U. board (unweighted)  
Small school districts have school choice  
All in one house – one curriculum shared  
Fast response for political/budget issues – don't need to weigh effect on multiple schools before making a decision  
Pride in local school achievements  
Working closely with teachers  
Town size gives good demographic diversity so neither retirees or parents dominate  
Carousel meetings for SU board help mitigate negative attitude  
Place-based education – grounding children and giving them a sense of place – cultural history  
Maintains a connection with the past, present, future  
S.U. is good size to provide support/oversight of SpEd.

**Disadvantages**

Some who run for boards may have a private agenda or narrow focus  
The power of one person can sway the process (current problem that may increase with the change)  
Number of meetings causes burnout for staff even more than for board members  
Three member board  
Need for part-time staff (too small)  
Protecting costs  
Insularity  
Perpetuates/fosters lack of collaboration in some administrative policy efforts, union-wide contract

Redundancy of effort/ inefficiency  
Possibility of board micro-management  
Too small for full-time superintendent  
Lack of elementary school choice  
Limited curriculum and enrichment offerings  
Property tax-based funding system  
Local income cannot sustain the required level of education and associated fixed costs  
Lack of voter knowledge about what is going on  
Limited in projecting school enrollments, costs, staff, etc.  
Not enough numbers of students to afford lots of choice  
Loss of local control  
Weighted voting is inappropriate  
No real opportunity for citizen input  
Quality of education  
Loss of integrity & identity of small towns – children lose their sense of community

**Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?**

**Advantages**

Choice within regional district easier – with support (transportation)  
One tax base – larger area facilitates new formulas  
Can redefine role of small schools (affect S/T ratio)  
Help recruit/retain/support staff  
New district boundaries would provide more fiscal equity; options in education funding  
Less work for supervisory staff  
Common contracts for supervisory union – professional negotiation  
Efficiency of scale – professional development; fiscal management  
Greater resources when combined: pre-school, post high school, buying power  
Reduce the “squeak of the squeaky wheel”  
May be an economical advantage  
Choice within region/district easier to support  
Larger region provides broader base from which to generate revenues  
Opportunity to share costs with other towns  
Fewer meetings for Essex/Cal superintendent but question how much impact that would have.  
Could see advantage for Orleans/Essex N. in recruiting superintendent & not burning him/her out  
Would not have to come up with so many volunteers on school board  
School Choice – if students could choose elementary or high school in another SU  
Consolidation of purchasing goods and services = increased cost efficiency  
Fewer meetings for Supt. = more time for direct presence in schools  
More support in teacher contract negotiations

**Disadvantages**

Potential removal of choice where it exists  
Loss of local control  
Poor geographics – longer bus routes  
Fear of small schools closing  
Reduced number of board members

Loss of sense of community  
Weighted voting  
Ability to develop community consensus  
Culturally juxtaposed to the traditions and community-centered history of Vermont  
A forced marriage  
Will not save money  
Towns will not have equal representation  
Local board loses full control of hiring administrators  
Grand list would be union-wide, disadvantage to smaller tax base  
Less protection for smaller schools – would need a minimum standard for distance to school, or provide transportation, for instance  
Would not have option to opt out of a poor union relation  
Need calculator to figure weighted votes!  
How would you sell the budget to the entire area – every little town?  
More work for each board member  
Less flexibility in teacher contracts  
How will communities with such varied economic and social values reach agreement on the issues that face school boards?  
Getting enough school board volunteers

**Debrief Comments:**

Consolidate superintendencies  
Work with teachers to arrive at multi-district contracts  
State take over health insurance  
Pre-K – 5 students remain in local school  
Supervisory Union Board offers/runs a 6-8 Middle School Program in multiple schools with each one focusing on a specialized area (Science, Art, etc.)  
Rather than proposal, just take the actual real issues that were brought up and address it  
Develop a board member coalition to talk about this – can't agree what the problem is  
Governance isn't as concrete as cost  
Seniority system of teachers makes it hard to get rid of weak links  
Not affecting quality & cost  
What black & white positive changes would come from this?  
Has the culture of the school improved in Lyndon or St. J. since they went to one large school?  
Has academic performance improved in Lyndon or St. J. since they went to one large school?  
Problems trying to solve: recruiting qualified superintendents, reducing administrative meetings, improving student achievement, and meeting needs of high-achieving students.